

## White Doe by Vethysnia

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**Summary:** Her sacrifice left him empty and scarred. So much had changed, and yet nothing had changed. Mike never realized how strong true love could be until now. Eleven/Mike Wheeler.

## 1. shock

Mike Wheeler / Eleven. Rated M for eventual lemon. Mike and Eleven are aged around 16 years old in this.

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He didn't know why he would still wander out into the woods, looking for her. He didn't really care anymore to be perfectly honest, for being alone out there, in the dampness and mist and firs, had become ingrained in his habitual schedule. As Mike Wheeler tread quietly along the delicately beaten path, he found himself in a thicket he strangely did not recognize, and yet his emotional state was so deadened he could not concern himself with the fact.

*You haven't been yourself for a while, man.*

*When are you going to get over her?*

*Face it, she's gone.*

Will, Lucas, and Dustin's voices echoed vaguely in the confines of his mind, as though they were words he planted there himself and not previously heard. They were one hundred percent correct in their claims, their advice lacking in sensitivity but drenched in yearning for their old Mike back.

He felt terrible for how he had been since Eleven disappeared before their very eyes. Yes, a few years had passed, but somehow it still wasn't enough. Although his grief had dissipated, what came to replace it was merely apathy, an apathy that alienated him even further from everyone else, even his few but beloved friends.

A misted cloud of a sigh escaped his slender lips chilled by the influx of autumn, he descended to sit in the damp layer of leaves below. He stared out into the dimly lit void of sunset beams, eyes routinely searching for a familiar silhouette which he longed to emerge from those shadows.

Mike intrinsically bemoaned that he should have moved on with his life by now, thinking with disdain how his perpetual state had driven

the few people who cared about him, and vice versa, away. But regardless of whether he was solitary or surrounded by others, he would always feel alone.

His childhood friends were once enough for him. And it frightened Mike that such might no longer be true. The changes in his body, his emotions, his social life, all paled in comparison to the thought of never seeing Eleven again.

Despite the odds, he never could convince himself that she was dead, or even truly gone. Sometimes he could almost feel her presence, as though her physical form lay hidden furtively beneath a fabric of space and time while he could still hear her gentle breath against his ear, feel the warmth of her innocent touch.

In his dreams he would see her eyes, that bottomless and soulful gaze. There was something pristine about her, the kind of beauty akin to a surprised doe caught off guard in the forest.

Sometimes he could even hear her voice.

*"I'm here...promise."*

Mike gripped his hair with both fists, tears threatening to fall from his ducts and probably further evidence of his complete emasculation. He was so weak. He thought he was better than this. He always wanted to be better. El especially brought that out of him.

But there came a time when one had to stop chasing ghosts. And what happened to people who never stopped chasing them? They probably withered and died alone, so alone. If he were to forever chase El's ghost, that would be his fate. In fact, it would appear to be happening before his very eyes.

He wished he was stronger. El had been lonely her entire life, and that still didn't stop her from having strength when it mattered.

"God, Eleven..." He whispered to seemingly no one, voice trembling as more tears slid down his porcelain cheeks. "I'm glad you can't see me like this..."

An alarmed gasp suddenly escaped from his constricted chest as he

felt the smooth fingertips of a hand gracefully cup his cheek.

"Don't cry..."

He couldn't even bear to look up. It was her voice, it was her touch; but he didn't think he could handle it if he tried to meet her gaze and it turned out to be someone else.

"Mike." She said more forcefully, dexterous hands lifting his head by the chin.

And he saw her, right there, so real, framed by the white gold light of a brumous dusk. She almost scintillated, so blinding and bright, he could only see her visage from the folds of sun beams. Her features creased with warmth, with recognition, with evident affection. She smiled softly, using a finger to wipe the wetness away from Mike's eyes and cheeks.

"No tears." She stated.

Mike rose immediately, seized her shoulders and roughly embraced her. She had no idea, *no* idea how long he waited for this moment. How he hoped, and wished, and prayed, and hoped wished and prayed some more just to see her, even if it was one last time.

"...H...how did you get back? Why did you leave us?" He sobbed quietly into the crook her neck, in that moment loving and hating her all at once.

Her hands wove themselves across the back of his neck, tangling themselves in his raven hair, and she pulled away slightly to face him.

"Didn't want to leave...but I protect you now. All of you."

Mike blinked, unsure of what to make of her elusive response, before his eyes unwittingly wandered further downward upon her figure as her ethereal light dimmed at last.

"OH MY GOD!" Shrieking he pushed her away much harder than he meant to, though it didn't seem to have much effect. Now she stood proudly, powerfully, and also was incredibly and undeniably naked.

"I-I'm sorry but what happened to your clothes?!" He stuttered, his back now facing her as he currently refused to look at her in such a state.

"Don't need them." She said, her voice now somber, slightly hurt by his reaction to what was probably her most natural form in whatever realm she now resided. Wherever she had been this entire time, something must have hindered her from communicating with this world, with him. Mike churned these thoughts within his mind and immediately regretted his immature reaction.

"Do you like...want my jacket or something? It's pretty long, and warm too."

She nodded, her brunette eyes averted as she despairingly tried to use the dead leaves beneath her to cover herself.

Through squinted eyes, he removed his jacket, ignoring the frigid air and placing it upon her sculptured shoulders.

"Button it up...okay?" He said, before turning his back on her once more.

She put on his jacket in silence. Her aural imminence turned cold, and he noticed.

He glanced at her, finally clothed, and approached her again, placing his hands on her shoulders.

"It's nothing personal...it's just, distracting, y'know?"

She might not have known, or understood, but she nodded anyway.

Mike hugged her again. "Can...you stay this time?"

Her eyes turned downcast and she shook her head no. His heart clenched, but if anything a few years ago had taught him, it was that there were powers and forces in this world and the next that were out of his, and even Eleven's control.

"Well, how long?" He asked tentatively.

"Tonight. Just tonight." Her voice was strained. This was as hard for her as it was for him.

He couldn't help it; he actually laughed, and her countenance turned into one of confusion.

"Just...it's funny is all, I guess we can hang out in my basement like old times for the night."

Her petite lips curled softly into the trademark shyness of her smile as she nodded in approval.

"Come on." Mike said, suddenly aware of how short of breath he was. He reached out to her with an outstretched hand. She took it firmly as she did years ago, when their trust in one another was a means of saving lives, including their own.

"It's getting cold, and my bike isn't far from here. You'd think I'd at least have my learner's permit by now..."

"Learner's...permit." She repeated quietly, testing the words, finding they had no meaning in her perspective.

The minutes cast themselves into silence between them. El grasped his hand with unwavering volition, perhaps even devotion, and Mike couldn't help but marvel at how astonishingly warm her hands were despite the chilling bite in the darkening air surrounding them. Occasionally he would glance at her, discreetly taking in the physical change that time had bestowed upon his unique friend.

Her hair was slightly frizzy, and so much longer, the strands wildly dangling below a chiseled collarbone and smooth, olive kissed sternum. She looked the same, but it was more glaringly obvious now than it had ever been that they both were morphing further into adulthood. Ironic, after all they had been through together, growing up still reigned champion as a far more frightening prospect.

He had never, since her, had such feelings for another girl, much less kiss her. The emptiness in his life Eleven had left caused him to further recede, and for years he lived with the painful vacancy. But none of that mattered anymore, at least for tonight. She was right

here, in the flesh, walking next to him.

He didn't know how, and he doubted El had learned how to properly articulate the process of how she went to wherever she had been all this time. And in all honesty, he wasn't sure he cared. She had returned, alive and well, beating the odds and statistics and ratios he had stacked against the chances after suffering her disappearance for so long.

Lost in the sifting continuum of his own thoughts, he hardly noticed El gripping his arm within both of hers, clinging to his side while still walking in sync. His breath hitched loudly when he came to his senses, but calmed himself, unknowing of El's satisfied expression midst their proximity.

*Warm...she's so warm.*

## 2. tenderness

"Finally, it's my bike!" He exclaimed abruptly, pointing ahead. "Haha, guess it was a little farther than I initially thought."

Mike mounted the cycle, the same banana seat upon which the two of them rode in the throes of yesteryear. Eleven approached his side, and leaned over to mount it as well. But before doing so she instead tilted her head towards his, planting a butterfly soft kiss against the chilled pale of his cheek. It was only seconds before the same cheek turned a bright, angry red, and Mike averted his eyes in boyish, misplaced embarrassment. He remembered the last time he had felt the smoothness of her lips, and his surprising initiative involved. He lamented the lack of that now, but felt a great relief in knowing she hadn't forgotten what was between them.

She promptly mounted the bike behind him, and he began pedaling towards home, painfully attentive to her arms wrapped securely around his waist, to the subtle mounds of her chest pressing into his back. As the glacial wind bit at his sensitive skin, it occurred to him that he wasn't Eleven's only friend in this world, that Lucas, Dustin, and Will would be ecstatic to lay eyes on her once again. But something about their encounter tonight seemed far too intimate, too private for the stimulation of anyone else being present. He could not help but also feel like she would prefer it that way anyway; suspected she was currently unable to process the nearness of too many. Something about her sudden return felt...reserved somehow.

Reserved for him.

For several moments life did not seem real as they pulled into his parking lot and went into the house through the basement entrance. Together they stood in his trademark gaming room, ever still littered with roleplay artifacts and game boards, their hands still laced together, almost in a trance brought on by the inconceivable chance of them ever seeing the other again.

"Uh...I'll get you something more comfortable to wear, be right back."



He made a quick dash for the laundry room, sorting through the clean items for one of many of Nancy's simple white night gowns. Entering the main basement room once more he presented the gown to her.

"Is this alright?"

El's eyes widened slightly, hands reaching out to take the gown from him and marveling at the softness of the fabric. "Very pretty."

Mike began to make his way to the bathroom to give her privacy, remembering well how she would become when enclosed in small spaces, but was stopped by El's insisting grasp on his wrist.

"No."

"Y...you want me to stay? In here? While you..."

Something flickered in the depths of her chocolate gaze, a hint of mischief, of jest.

"Just turn around." She said, her voice strangely even.

"O-okay...sure."

So he turned his back to her, and tried his hardest not to listen to the silken rustle of clothing as she slid into Nancy's night gown in the pregnant seconds that followed.

"Mike." She said at last.

He turned to look at her, and froze, succumbing to total bodily paralysis upon seeing her, eyes idiosyncratically blinking as they roved her skin veiled by slightly translucent white cotton. His heart, and stomach sank at her beauty, his breath caught ruthlessly in his throat as the pit of anxiety in his core grew with every aching moment.

Being who he was, how he was, people told him his entire life something like this would never happen to him, and he never realized how much he had come to believe it. This girl believed in him, fought for him, died for him in a way perhaps, maybe even

loved him. And he would be a fool to deny that he felt the same, but regardless it was hard to shake years of instilled self deprecation.

She took a step toward him, and he didn't move away, but instead he flinched, as though he expected aggression. El spread her arms, pulling him into their tight embrace and massaged the hairline of his raven black locks. Mike couldn't help it; he burst into quiet sobs in the crook of her neck, unable to bear confining his emotional strife any longer. She said nothing, merely continued to dexterously comb her fingers through his fine, obsidian strands.

"I'm sorry for being such a pussy..." He mumbled thickly, his face wet with tears and utterly flushed as El pulled him away from her neck.

Her stare met his with feverish electricity, a deep desire of some kind yearning to make itself known. Boldly leaning in, she pressed her lips against his, briefly, before pulling away. Mike watched with half lidded eyes as she licked her lips, tasting his saliva on them.

Again she leaned in, capturing his lips this time more wantonly, grazing them with tongue and teeth alike, coaxing them to reciprocate. Initially, above all he was astounded by her forthright nature, distinctly reminded of how she preferred actions to words. His stomach churned, aflame with anxiety, with adrenaline, with an intoxicating haze he had only remembered ever tasting in microscopic doses.

Her body pressed against his, the mild yet developing curves of her stature aching to meld with the boy who saved her from a lifetime of vilification, and to whom she felt compelled to return the favor. Her warmth was consuming now, the heat exhaling from her aural presence nearly stifling, and slowly he felt himself surrendering. The questions, the doubts, and the long years of depression gradually melted away with every adoring caress she gave him.

He had such little experience with this kind of raw human instinct. Never had he felt such a carnal desire toward another person, or undying admiration. She had given him so much. It was because of her that things were able to go back to normal after the miasma of insanity. It was because of her he had all of his friends back, safe and sound, and life went on. But they didn't. No, they couldn't. Mike

wanted so much to accept that she was gone, to move on and bury what happened in the deepest compartments of his analytic, yet emotional mind. But he would never give up hope. And it was that same hope that ate him alive every day she was gone.

The universe was somehow communicating to him through all of this. It was too easy and presumptuous to call it a reward for their struggles somehow, a simplification of something far more complex. Whatever her reason for vanishing for so long, and returning for tonight only, it was her business, and it was evident that she did not want to spend the evening searching for the proper words to describe something probably unimaginable to someone who had never witnessed it.

The prospect of all this frightened him, made his guts twist and tangle themselves in a grotesque, bile dripping knot. Years of societal inflicted inadequacy would have to be sacrificed, pushed into the furthest corners of his consciousness to give her what she appeared to want most from him now. When he really thought about it, it wasn't so complicated, not so intense an idea. She sacrificed so much for him, for the people he knew and cared about besides her. It would be far from punishment, to show her in more candid ways how much he loved her.

Her need was overwhelming, growing with an almost manic yearning, and before he knew it he had found himself pushed backward into his flimsy fold-up board game table. Releasing a shuddering breath, he firmly grabbed her by the shoulders, and forced her to look him in the eye.

"Can we just...take this slow? I've never done this before."

Eleven's eyes fluttered, as though stricken with a sudden bolt of lucidity, and she reached up to gently stroke his cheek.

"Me...neither, I just...Mike, I..."

He kissed her once more, delicately silencing her muddled sentence.

"I still want to..." Mike whispered huskily as his forehead remained pressed against the smoothness of hers. "I just want to do it right."

### 3. natural

Lemon chapter. All previous warnings apply.

One more chapter to go after this, and yes I do have the ending already planned.

Thank you to everyone who has reviewed, favorited or followed this story. It came from the heart and a place of true love. Seriously, thank you.

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He gestured with his neck the direction of a door next to the basement laundry room. "My bed is in there...I started sleeping down here after you disappeared."

His lips curved into a faint, subtle smile, and he took both her hands within his own and led her into his second bedroom, the two of them climbing awkwardly atop his immaculate sheets and settling down next to one another, arms entwined, lips exploring, minds overcome with solely one another and hardly anything else.

Her hands slid underneath his shirt, probing upward, innocently exploring the subtle differences between them, before coaxing him to remove it completely. Mike blushed furiously, knowing how far from athletic his body was, and how it was almost completely untouched by the sun.

Awkwardly scratching the back of his head, he laughed timidly. "I'm so pale..."

She said nothing at first, merely lowered her head to his bare chest, brushing her lips against his ashen flesh.

"Soft." She said breathlessly, her hand gliding along the narrow curve of his waste and to the acute elegance of his hip bone.

He lowered his neck to gently inhale the scent of autumn leaves emitting from her tangled brunette tresses, taking the risk and allowing his hands to wander across the roving fluency that was her

ripening figure. His fingers tenderly grasped her thigh, gradually coaxing them, and the hem of her bunched nightgown further upward.

"So are you." He said, their eyes locking, one pair of the smoothest chocolate and the other of the blackest space.

She nestled even closer against him, and as her slender legs shifted he was at last suddenly aware of how great his own physical need was. His body seemed to pulse in a sporadic breed of harmony; his veins flooded with blood, and a primal inclination that was measurably overruling any fear, or anxiety he harbored for quite the allotment of time.

He was in love with the girl so deeply enmeshed in his personal space, and it was only biological he wanted to show her in more ways than one. Never had he felt so much trust in another person, so much trust that at that point it would be foolish to question whether she felt the same.

The soft contours of El's lips hungrily sought the curves of his collarbone, and once again he felt himself quiver with ardor. His mind wanted to be lost in the endless stream of sensation, but his body called to him, cajoled him back to the world of corporeality, presenting its yearning in more obvious ways.

Mike exhaled heavily, clumsily sitting up to remove the remainder of his clothing, pausing when the only thing covering him was his briefs. He closed his eyes, counted to five, and without opening them removed the last garment. The cool basement air did nothing to stifle the heat radiating from his lower half, and all he could do was hope he didn't look ridiculous.

He flinched when he felt her hands upon him, and he opened his eyes to see her leading him by hand back to the bed, where she would sit with her athletic legs tucked neatly beneath her as she unabashedly discarded the nightgown, tan olive skin revealed in full with a vanishing flash of sheer white cloth.

Mike bit his lip, forcing himself not to look away as he so often did. He allowed himself to observe, in great detail, the conflicting

simplicity and complexity of her being, and he drank in each nuance where it would be forever cherished. He barely noticed when she began to, surprisingly enough, become bashful at his nigh excessive gaze, and he quickly focused his attention once more, as though breaking free of a trance.

"...Pretty?" She asked quietly, the primitive query ever timid, and her expression creased in a forlorn sort of prodigal entrustment.

Mike couldn't help himself; he chuckled slightly, hoping laughter would ease the paradoxical tension within him. He shifted closer to her, approaching her on his hands and knees and lightly claiming her lips.

"More than pretty. A-a lot more."

Her smile was radiant, close mouthed yet teeming with something pure. Ever still pure, despite her visage suddenly surmounted by an evident, and galvanic hunger. He realized she was unwilling to wait much longer, her patience wearing thin, and admittedly his own composure was slowly dissipating as she forcefully pulled him next to her once more.

The starkness of their bare skin clashed, and visceral sensation tore through them both, but Mike had minimal time to process it before she emphatically kissed him, again, and again, her effortful breath rising in volume to quiet moans.

It was uncanny each time he was unsure how to proceed, she would graciously prompt him with aid of her own. He wanted so badly to touch her, to grasp every part of her and never let go. Her silken hands slithered down his chest, hesitating slightly as they reached the thick patch of onyx body hair on his lower abdomen. He didn't realize it, but he held his breath, anticipating her next touch, closing his eyes and barely stifling an errant murmur as she tantalizingly stroked the erect shaft of his member with exploratory, spry fingers.

He throbbed eagerly against her feather-like touch, more blood fleeing from his head and pooling in a frenzied mass within his stomach and groin. The top row of his teeth sank firmly into his swollen bottom lip as he tried with what little cognition he still

possessed to concentrate.

The other boys at school who would graphically describe this particular experience would, from then on, leave him all the more baffled, for this was so far from any kind of conquest. To even think of El as a prize to be won hypothetically made him feel briefly ill.

How often she would reach for him without reluctance; peculiar, how she was robbed of many things in her young lifetime except her ability to love and pleasure another person. It was a slow, and dilating process, but ultimately Mike was able to set aside his inhibitions, wanting to show her that he could love her back just as wholly. He advanced toward her, gently reclining El onto her back, and hovered above her whilst his lips gingerly trailed down the nape of her neck.

Mike tilted his head away to hazily gauge her reaction; her lids were shut tight, with dark brown lashes fluttering hectically against her cheekbones. She opened them, silently inquiring as to why he halted.

He swallowed with great difficulty, casting his gaze down the athletic slopes of her neck and collarbone, and at last daring to go further. He felt himself tremble subtly as his stare fixated upon her chest, before lowering his mouth to envelope the dusky, budding tip of her right mound. A subdued murmur escaped from her lips ever ajar, her back arching and delicately pushing the front of her torso further against his. Mike alarmingly pulled away, still unsure how to measure a positive response from a negative.

"A-are you alright?"

He must have appeared confused, perhaps even bewildered. But regardless, her expression seemed enraptured, and there was no other way to describe it. The way she looked at him made him want to weep, and he wasn't sure why. She looked at him as though he were her lifeline, her ultimate connection to that for which she longed, and grieved in desperation for more than anyone should have to bear. To know unequivocally, that she felt every bit the same as he did her, that she wanted him in this way and would fain accept him so completely, made his heart feel so heavy, and light all at once.

Biting his lip, he grimaced slightly as his body pulsed with a rush of endorphin so powerful the sensation was nearly painful. He had underestimated how overcast his cognizance would be, and somehow assumed that, in a different way, the tension was sure building just as uncomfortably for her.

"El...?" He started with delicate urgency, "Do you...know how to do this?"

For perchance the first time, he watched in mild surprisal as she immediately smiled, and began laughing softly, whilst she laid her palm warmly across his perspiring cheek to caress it.

"Yes, Mike. It's okay."

And she kissed him blithely to seal her affirmation.

The dam broke; the tears fell, but he acted anyway, pushing through them, returning her smile with dark eyes glistening with saccharine felicity. He kissed her once more, at last allowing his body to move in concordance with its desires, with her body, with the strange variables by virtue of mother nature herself.

He knelt between her legs, awkwardly positioning himself against her although they were both too lost in the boundless cycle of their collective euphoria to take notice of his cumbersome maneuverability. For a moment he paused, closing his eyes as he experimentally rolled his hips against hers, the engorged and sensitive tip of him swathed by the intense heat, moisture, and tightness of her exquisite being and earning a strangled gasp from them both.

Mike hovered above her, their bare chests and stomachs melding, and he kissed her cheek wetly, before whispering one last shred of coherent solace.

"I'm sorry if it hurts...I...I love you, El."

He entered her fully, evoking from her a quiet yet reactive murmur while he could merely cling to her for dear life as he vaguely attempted to process the visceral physical pathos into which they



were both now plunging head first. His eyelids squeezed tightly shut; he buried his face into the contour of her neck, unable to handle the visual stimuli of gazing upon her, and began compelling his hips forward repeatedly.

Labored breath passed his lips, as did hers echoing gently in the shell of his ear, and everything felt so carnally authentic; a precious thing, a *natural* thing. Time disappeared, and Mike's only sundial became Eleven's encouraging and responsive whispers assisting him in navigating where, and how to please her. In the back of his bewitched mind he vaguely mused at how perfect her nonverbal approach was in this kind of predicament.

Her movements against him grew more insistent, and instinctively he thrust into her with more force, drawing from her throat a trembling moan far too conspicuous, ergo he kissed her to muffle the sound. Her slick depth tightened around him almost unbearably, rhythmically constricting him, and finally pushing him over the edge.

Biting his lip too hard for comfort, he vainly tried to silence his uninhibited whisper of a gasp as he came within her. Came for her. *With* her, even. The sensation was so intense that though his eyes were vice-like in closure, he could not help but cry from such a physical, and nearly metaphysical shared epiphany. His ministrations slowed, and he, with lack of coordination, rolled over beside El, his arm languidly resting upon the smooth concave of her stomach.

"So...did it hurt?" He asked tentatively, his eyelids already becoming heavier by the second.

Through a squinted stare he saw Eleven smile shyly and shake her head.

"Are you sure?" Mike pressed further.

"Mike." She said firmly, reaching to him and pulling herself closer to his side. "I'm very sure."

Strangely enough, she issued forth her own query. "...Is it supposed to?"

Mike yawned, knowing then fully how exhausted he was; how fulfilled, and at peace. He embraced her more steadfastly, gently massaging her shoulder.

"I'm not sure...it's just what I heard."

What mild tension cleared, on its own to no one's surprise, and the afterglow continued to soothe them into slumber.

As Mike's consciousness faded into the essence of softness, of tenderness, of all things that made life bearable, he could have sworn he caught sight of a stark white female deer innocently grazing upon a small patch of bright green grass, eclipsed by darkness, and reflected in the watery black surface beneath her.

## 4. catharsis

Author's note:

This story was inspired by 'Do You Love Me Too' by Enigma.

First off, to all of you who provided an actual review that said what you liked about this story as well as meaningful feedback, I wanted to finish this for you guys. It's a happy ending. She doesn't stay, but it's still happy.

There's a lot of symbolism in this, and I'm sorry if you don't get it, but I really don't want to explain it for fear of spoiling its mysticism. So make of it what you will.

It's taken me a long time to get back on the fanfiction wagon, and I'm so glad I did. Thank you all who reviewed this. I hope you enjoyed it, as well as this ending chapter, as much as I enjoyed writing it.

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Mike didn't remember the last time he was able to drift soundly off to sleep without the white noise of his insecurities cackling in his ear. At first he seemed to sink, his entire being blessed with tranquility as a great darkness, not of nullity and despair but of solace, began to envelope him. All the while, Eleven's arms remained stubbornly linked around the slender angles of his waist, as though she too was witnessing his dream.

And together, they then ascended, away from the void, away from any material form, into a world of orange and rose pink glass. Mike's eyes fluttered, consciousness returning to him in a manner unfitting of a normal dream, and he found himself wide awake in seconds as he observed his surroundings. Widened, amazed eyes consumed the sight, the sheer wonder instilled within him far outweighing any disbelief.

Eleven shifted beside him; goodness, he nearly forgot she was still there. He quickly began nudging her.

"El...El wake up...look where are are..."

She sat up slightly, breathing deep the bracing, oceanic air in their midst, despite there being no sign of an ocean anywhere. If he were to guess with any shred of logic, they were engulfed by the clouds and the sky during perpetual dusk or dawn, possibly above an endless sea.

"I wanted you to see where I went." She said dreamily, her distant stare tranquilly roving the surreal horizon.

Mike remembered, a little too well unfortunately, the details divulged unto him by both Eleven and Will Byers regarding the horror of the Upside Down, let alone his close encounter of the third kind with the Demogorgon. All of the horrific imagery planted within his mind via the events seemed to dissipate into nothing as the humid wind and warm glow of this eerie, yet heavenly place seemed to heal him from the inside out.

He turned his gaze on her again, completely understanding why it would take a domain like this to turn the frightened, unsure, and broken girl beside him into the confident youth he came to know so very well that night. This was who Eleven really was; the raw untainted part of her that somehow persisted through all the abuse, the crooked perspectives, and the skewed cognition.

All which became so much weight to bear, she risked her life the first time for the sake of her freedom. It was like she knew her sanity would not be waiting for her outside those walls, but at least she would be given the dignity to be able to search for it on her own.

"So you've been...here all this time?" Mike whispered shakily.

She nodded, her serene smile widening.

"I thought I had died...at the school." She said. "But I came here instead. I just...felt so warm, and then I woke up here."

Mike blinked, mildly stupefied. El hadn't stuttered, or cut short a sentence at all since she brought him there. And yet to that think she would find herself here, after everything she had went through, of all places another unknown realm of mythical beauty and peace instead of poison and decay. It was no wonder she would feel comfortable

enough to speak freely in such a celestial gift to the senses and soul alike.

"So, uh...what exactly is this place?"

She pondered for a moment's time, before testing her answer. "The Rightside...Up?"

Mike exhaled heavily, chuckling afterward, amused at how much ridiculous sense it made. He reached for her hand, gripping its smooth, elegant bones and skin firmly, lovingly.

Eleven turned to lock stares with him, her velvet brown eyes shining and reflective of the surrounding pink clouds whose hues were slowly turning from vivacious pink and coral to the twilight colors of sunset. Night was falling here. And it was just as beautiful, if not more so, as the day.

"Eleven, can I ask you something personal?"

She nodded, her brows furrowing, obviously unsure of what he meant by 'personal'.

"How...did you know how to do it? I mean...us, earlier...you know?" Was his stumbling query.

She smiled shyly in return. "Papa showed me pictures...gave me books to read. But I never knew what it all meant."

Mike raised an eyebrow. "...That's it? He didn't give you like, 'a talk'?"

Expression suddenly forlorn, she shook her head, and stared out into the distance. But she did not shut down, and continued to speak.

"I spent a long time here, thinking about things." She said softly.

"Like what?" He asked, unsure of why he was afraid to hear the answer, whilst his grasp of her hand remained ever steadfast.

"I thought about you...always. The more I grew, I just changed. I would..."

Her words ceased short, a blush so fiery spreading upon her pebble smooth face it nearly set her aflame.

"I-I would...touch myself...and think about you."

By then Mike's own face was also blushing violently, and he couldn't help but avert his gaze, humbled by her trust in him that she would tell him something like that. To add insult to injury his lips could not help but smile on their own knowing such intimate details about the girl he loved.

"After a while, the books and diagrams made sense..." She further explained, her own mouth slightly pursed to stifle her delight at his reaction as she leaned over and affectionately kissed him sloppily on the cheek.

Mike cleared his throat, his temporarily evading senses returning. "Well uh...thank you for telling me. It's...it's nice to know."

Several moments past in a strangely emanated silence.

"Mike..." She said, this time more hesitant, but ever still pensive. "Did you dream of a white doe?"

"Y-yeah...I did actually. What about it?"

"I saw it too...I see it all the time here. I follow it sometimes...I don't get too close, it's very shy."

"What...is it? Is it really a deer?" Mike pressed, his dark, infinite eyes wide with curiosity.

"...It's just...a native." She said, vague once more, but he somehow understood the underlying meaning. As the Demogorgon was a native to the Upside Down, the doe was native to the Rightside Up.

"I'm sorry it took me so long to get back." Eleven said abruptly, her words solid with meaning in their tones.

"What the hell do you mean?" Mike squeezed her hand almost painfully tight, but she did not show any sign of discomfort. "You saved all of our lives, El. You have nothing to apologize for."

"But Mike...I could see you. I watched you. You were so sad. You cried at night. You didn't eat."

He was temporarily stunned by her blunt, and accurate description of him during her absence.

"And that's my fault." She said, her voice final. "I tried to come back...I tried to let you know...but I didn't figure out how to in time."

Eleven sighed in frustration, biting her bottom lip. "I could only watch over you...protect you."

He exhaled exasperatedly, before taking both of her hands within his.

"Look...we're both alright now. Don't you see that? I was sad because I thought you were dead, and that I would never see you again. But you finally made it back, and now that I know you're okay...heck, *more* than okay, I'm going to be fine. We're *all* going to be fine."

And then he kissed her, pressing his lips against hers, savoring the flavor of her mouth, the brisk, sea salt smell of her skin and hair for the last time until god knew when.

"I know you can't stay..." He whispered whilst pulling away, sucking in the full sight of her precious features. "And you don't need to. As long as it takes for you to come back for good...I'll wait for you."

Eleven smiled so wide, her eyes brimming with tears finally letting loose in wet sliding rivers down her cheeks. Mike kissed her again, but was startled as he drew back, seeing a thick smear of blood leaking from her nostril.

"I...I'm running out of energy keeping you here..." She said with slurred language.

Mike supported her with his body before gently laying her down and joining her.

"It's okay El...you can send me back." He said, a lump rising to his throat at the thought of parting with her again, but he swallowed, composed himself, and felt it wane.

Mike embraced and clung to her tightly, resting his chin upon her brunette head, knowing that sleep would both take them over again, and he would be back in the realm in which he belonged. Unconsciously, his hand found her left breast, desperate to feel her heartbeat as he drifted away from this place, and away from her. With squinted eyes, he noticed the doe of gleaming white in the distance, silhouetted brightly against the cosmic purple of this ambrosial dimension's night with its glass-like cloven hooves embedded in the dust of clouds.